

Once

A girl ate ices
in the red summer. Bees
buzzed among the hydrangea,

heavy as plums.
Summer widened
its lens.

You would not believe
how happy she was;
her mother pulled her

through the pool till her hair
went soft. Below,
cracks spread in the vinyl

where her mother's long legs
scissored; above, wet faces
in the sun smiled.

At dusk, lamps were lit,
Vs of geese swept past,
fresh sheets shivered

on the laundry line,
and as the nights grew crisp
our souls unfolded.

Then winter arrived.
The parents bent over the daughter
tucked in her bed;

creaking from the cold,
the black walnut's roots
swelled beneath the snow.

When spring came, the home
had tilted into the tree's
long, crooked shadow. Nothing

was the same again.

Frontier

I wandered to what I thought
was the empire's frontier,
a river of sand, a strip of paper mills.
I met with the tinkers and the tailors
hawking their wares,
I passed under the three bridges
where the fires were,
and sang *Tweedle-hee, tweedle-ha,*
a penny for a saw.
I paid a toll to the taker
then sold my blood
for money. I needed to eat:
plastic-wrapped chicken, cookies
and chocolate. At times,
I felt sick, intoxicated
by BPA and mercury.
At other times I fasted and the stars
stumbled clear from the vault.
Up there, the universe stands around drunk.
I hope the Lord is kind to us,
for we engrave our every mistake,
teasing and repenting,
coming clean for his sake.

Apartment Living

So those despotic loves have become known to you,
rubbing cold hands up your thighs,
leaving oily trails,
whispering, *Just how you like it, right?*

Upstairs the sorority girls are playing charades
again, smoking cigarettes, wearing shifts, burning
pain into their synapses.

Life is a needle. And now it pricks you:
your attempts at decadence
tire the earth and tire you. The etymology
of "flag" as in "to signal to stop"
is unknown. It is time to sit and watch. Don't
call that one again, he's pitiless in his self-certainty.
You used to be so.

You laid your black dress on the bed.
You stepped in your heels over sidewalk cracks.
You licked mint and sugar from the cocktail mixer,
singing nonsense songs,
and the strangers, they sang along.